



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #25: Ensuring Equality for Women

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 19, 2014

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In Governor Cuomo's 2013 State of the State address, he challenged legislators to reject institutional and cultural norms and make New York a leader in creating equality for women.

I'm proud that my Senate colleagues and I have twice met his challenge.

We've passed nine bills that would stop human trafficking, ensure equal pay for equal work, combat sexual harassment in the workplace, end gender-based discrimination in employment, housing and credit, require reasonable accommodations for pregnant women in the workplace and provide stronger protections for victims of domestic violence.

Unfortunately, just one of those bills has become law. It says a protected party – the alleged victim - cannot be charged with violating an order of protection made on their behalf.

As of this writing, the rest of the legislation is stuck in limbo for political reasons. Four Democratic Assemblywomen and women's rights advocates have urged the Assembly to take action on these bills before session ends.

We need to get tough on human trafficking. Buying and selling human beings is inhumane. It's disgusting. And the legislation in this package could limit its prominence in the Empire State.

We need to ensure equal pay for equal work. Women earn 84 cents for every \$1 men earn. Our legislation would prohibit employees from paying disparate amounts for the same job due to gender.

We also shouldn't let employers discriminate against women who have children or are pregnant. If you're good enough for the job or the promotion, employers should not factor in your family status. We have these protections for credit and housing. Let's extend them to employment.

And if a court agrees that you were discriminated against based on your gender, you should be allowed to recover attorney's fees. Otherwise, we're discouraging potential victims from obtaining justice.

If your boss is sexually harassing you, you should have the ability to report that – regardless of the company's size. We want to close a loophole that currently prohibits those harassed from complaining to the state if the business employs four or fewer people.

We need to make sure that landlords aren't discriminating against victims of domestic violence, whether it be by denying a rental entirely or increasing the price. Our laws should help domestic violence victims stay away from their abuser, not put them back in the same situation because of housing concerns.

Our last piece of legislation would allow for electronic filing of orders of protection. It better protects alleged victims and recognizes that modern conveniences can be utilized to make the process more efficient.

It's my hope that we've gotten this done by the time you read this column. If not, please know this issue remains a priority for me and my Senate colleagues.